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Buckley Sets Precedent

Persuasive evidence that the Soviet renegade Arkady Shevchenko's "autobiography" is a CIA concoction is raising new questions about collusion between the espionage services and the publishing business to delude the American public with such apocryphal narratives.

According to SPOTLIGHT sources the CIA practice of secretly sponsoring such works goes back several decades. The effect of this disinformation program, aimed primarily at Americans, has been to poison the mainstream of history.

Said one experienced diplomat: "We live in a society wherein we can no longer tell truth from falsehood. Monstrous and massive falsifications of the past are becoming commonplace. It's an Orwellian world."

According to this highly placed source (who agreed to a candid discussion of this sensitive issue on condition that his identity remain protected) it was the now-famous TV chat-show host and spy novelist William Buckley Jr. who inaugurated this era of CIA potboilers, which are given respectable fronts with the imprints of major publishers.

In 1952 or '53, this seasoned observer related, the late Allen Dulles, then serving as director of the CIA, developed a personal interest in a well-known Chilean defector, Eudocio Ravines, who had led an interesting life, in both the Soviet Union and Red China, before he broke with communism in 1950.

From Paris, where Ravines was hiding from the KGB's hit squads, the CIA secretly flew him to a more accessible location in Mexico City, where he was lodged in a safehouse. Buckley, then working as a Clandestine Services operative, was assigned to work with Ravines in revising and editing a manuscript the ex-communist had already partly compiled.

When Buckley was finished adapting the Chilean's jottings to the CIA's requirements, the work was published, not as a product of the Clandestine Services (which it was) but as an authentic Ravines autobiography, by Charles Scribner & Sons, then one of the foremost New York publishing houses.

"Under the title 'The Yenan Way' the Ravines book sold well," recalled this source. "It proved a success: It spread the CIA gospel and it made money for Scribner's. The trouble is that Buckley's CIA potboiler set a precedent; many more such doctored works followed, and the end result has been massive disinformation."

According to this foreign affairs expert (whose account has been extensively confirmed by other sources) the Clandestine Services officer who supervised Buckley's "potboiler project" was E. Howard Hunt, then a senior official in the CIA's Mexico City Clandestine Services station.

"Hunt went on to become an outright counterfeiter, 'document doctor' and disinformation agent," recounted another source, a former CIA analyst. "Yet the distortions of history he perpetrated with Bill Buckley may prove, ultimately, his most damaging and pernicious forgeries."

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